STENDHAL

(1783–1842)

Marie Henri Beyle, the French author, known under the pseudonym of "Stendhal" (from Stendal, the home of Winkelmann, whom he greatly admired), was the first of the French fiction writers to break away from the romantic conception into the realism of an accurate, unimpassioned, detailed examination of actual life, as laid down in his remarkable novel *Le Rouge et le Noir*. Even in his love-letters one discovers that sober regard for remorseless truth mingled with the disenchantment of cynicism, which characterised his fiction. His affairs of the heart were always under the control of his affairs of the head.

Stendhal to the Countess Clémentine Curial

PARIS, *June 24th*, 1824, *midday*.

You cannot imagine what sombre thoughts your silence has created. I thought you would have found time last night before your departure to write me a

few lines, which you could have put in the box at L——. As I did not, however, see a letter from you yesterday, I hoped for one this morning. I said to myself, that during the change of horses in S——, she will have asked for a sheet of writing paper. But no. Solely and only occupied with her little daughter, she forgets him who does nothing else but think of her.

With closed window-shutters I dream, seated at my writing-table, and amuse myself in the gloom of my anxiety by composing the following letter, which you perhaps will soon be sending to me. What else could have prevented you, to write me a few words ?

Here then is the letter, which I shall sooner or later be called upon sorrowfully to peruse.

" My dear Henri,—You have made me promise to be sincere. This preamble to my letter will enable you to foresee, what still remains to be added. Do not take it too much to heart, my friend ; remember that in the absence of livelier feelings, there will always be the bond of sincere friendship between us, which will assure you of the tenderest sympathy in everything that befalls you. From the tone of my letter you will gather, dear friend, that the most absolute confidence has taken the place of feelings of another nature. I cherish the hope that you will justify it, that I shall never have to regret what I have been to you.

" Farewell, dear friend ! Let us both be reasonable. Accept the friendship, the tenderest friendship, which I offer you, and do not fail to visit me on my return to Paris.

" Farewell, my friend.

" Menta."

Stendhal to Guiditta Pasta (the celebrated Italian opera-singer)

Paris, *August 21st*, 1825.

Madame,—I have the feeling that my enterprise is ridiculous. Since more than two months, day by

day, I argue with myself, how ridiculous, yes, how improper it would be, if I, unknown individual, dared to write to a celebrated woman, who without doubt is in touch with everything bright and amiable in France. I personally am an unknown, simple cavalry lieutenant of the Guards, recently transferred here, dependent upon my paternal remittance. I am no Adonis, although not an ugly man. Before I had the good fortune to know you, before my rebirth, which took place on that day, on which you sang the "Viago à Reims," I fancied I was well built, respectable and distinguished to look upon. Since then I have entirely lost that good opinion of myself. Everything about me seems banal, with the exception of the flaming passion, which you have set alight in me. For what reason do I tell you all this? I feel too well that my undertaking is ridiculous! You will show my letter to people, who will crack their jokes at my expense. Oh, what pain beyond measure! Jokes about my passion for Signora Pasta! and yet I swear to you, Signora, the danger of making myself ridiculous in your eyes is not in itself that which makes me timid. For you I would face dangers immeasurably greater. But I would die of grief, if I heard strangers talk about my love for you. This love is my life. I take music lessons, I learn Italian, I read the papers which I never even used to glance at, in the hope to discover your name therein. I only peruse page after page for the big P, with which your name begins, and my heart beats, when I find one, even though followed by an indifferent word.

But why do I relate to you all my follies? How will that help me? How could I become acquainted with you? How could I be presented to you? I am only introduced in a few old-fashioned salons, which have no relations with you. I frequent the Duke of ——, do you go there? I am very unhappy, Signora. You cannot understand my immeasurable grief! For twenty years I was devoured by the longing to come to Paris, I was crazy about horses;

a soldier in body and soul. All that has now become distasteful to me.

How could I become acquainted with you ? Whenever you were staying in Paris, I got into a cab, as if expecting someone, and gazed at your windows. But you are in the country, so I hear, and I cannot get the porter to tell me the name of the place. I believe I am afraid of the man. Oh, I detest myself ! and if I should have the good fortune to be presented to you, you too would be afraid of me.

I have had to break off my letter. I was too unhappy.

I am twenty-six years old, dark, fairly tall ; one can see that I am a soldier, as the people say ; but after the incident with your porter, I have had my whiskers trimmed as much as possible. Had it not been contrary to regimental regulations, I would have had them taken off altogether. Oh, if only you would not be afraid of my distressed appearance, if I ever should have the good fortune to be presented to you ! Have no fear, Signora, I am not at all importunate. I shall never speak to you of my unhappy passion. I am content to become acquainted with you. I shall say nothing but, " I am Charency."

Fool that I am ! They will pronounce my name quite loud enough, when I am presented to you.

But I will go on telling you about myself. I come of a good family from Lorraine. I shall have a comfortable income to fall back upon. I have received an excellent education. The pity is that nobody ever hit on the idea to let me go to Italy, or I should understand Italian and, above all, music. Perhaps—but that seems to me impossible—I should love you more passionately, if I were to appreciate the heavenly melodies which you sing, as a connoisseur, but, no, no, that seems to me impossible !

Farewell, Signora, my letter is much too long already. And besides, what is the good of my writing to you ?

With the greatest esteem, Signora, I am your devoted and most obedient servant

EDMOND DE CHARENCY.